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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

Here you will find information about interesting books on the immigration experience, genealogical manuals, books on Swedish customs, and much more. We welcome contacts with SAG readers, suggestions on books to review perhaps. If you want to review a book yourself, please contact the Book Review Editor, Dennis L. Johnson, at <1_viking@verizon.net> or Dennis Johnson, 174 Stauffer Road, Bucktown Crossing, Pottstown, PA 19465, so he knows what you are working on.

High up in the Rockies

Up in the Rocky Mountains, Writing the Swedish American Experience, Jennifer Eastman Attebery, University of Minnesota Press, 2007, 305 pages, Illustrated, Softcover, Amazon.com, \$20.00 plus shipping

Many books have been written to chronicle the Swedish immigrant experience in the more well-known destinations for Swedes coming to the U.S. Both works of non-fiction and many historical novels have as their settings Midwest farm communities, Chicago, the Twin Cities, and other locations noted for large Swedish American populations. Usually, these Swedes lived or settled among many others from their homeland.

This book by Jennifer Attebery looks at a mostly different group of Swedes who, for one reason or another, headed for more remote locations scattered throughout the American West. Most of the people who are subjects of this work were born in Sweden and migrated to the western mountain states along with the settlement and exploration of these areas by both westward bound Americans, and other immigrants from Europe. The attraction which drew these travelers in the latter part of the 19th century and into the first decades of the 20th century included railroad building, mining, forestry, farming, and a few other activities.

The Swedes involved in this early settlement of the West were for the

most part more isolated from their own countrymen than were those in most other immigrant locations. Many were the only Swedes or Swedish families in their area, or had only a few neighbors who were. In some of the largest communities such as Denver and Salt Lake City, there were enough Swedes to establish a Swedish neighborhood, churches, clubs, and Swedish societies. In the more remote areas, Swedes were often able to develop networks of contact with others in the same vicinity, but others were too isolated even for that.

The author is a professor of English at Idaho State University, where she teaches folklore and American studies, and where she directs the American Studies Program. Her source material for this book included 54 collections of letters which she found at the Swedish Immigrant Institute in Växjö, Sweden. These letters were written by some 74 writers, a total of 331 letters in all. These letters were mostly from Swedes in the Rocky Mountain region and written to relatives and friends in Sweden. From these 331 letters, a total of 20 were carefully translated with the assistance of Christina Johansson at the Swenson Center in Rock Island, IL. These translations are reprinted in the Appendix of the book, accompanied by a paragraph describing the writer's origin in Sweden and their location in the Rocky Mountain west. Many translations were difficult due to poor handwriting or the limited fluency of the writers. Ample footnotes explain the more ambiguous or uncertain translations.

After a preface which describes briefly the participation by Swedes in the expansion of the American West, the author has written eight chapters of her analysis and interpretation of these letters. The first chapter discusses vernacular letter writing as a folk practice, and the second discusses the characteristics of letter writing as a genre. The third chapter describes the nodes and networks of settlement by these Swedes in the Rockies, and the fourth, their experiences in becoming American workers. How these immigrants identified with their newly adopted region is the subject of another chapter. Religious language in the letters of these immigrants is dissected in the following chapter, and the concluding chapter addresses what we can learn from reading these vernacular letters. Period photographs are included in the text to illustrate some of the persons and places mentioned. The scholarly and meticulous approach of the author is no doubt to the benefit of other scholars in folklore, linguistics, and other disciplines, but the lay reader longs to just read the letters and find out more about the lives of the writers.

When one finally gets to read the twenty selected letters in the Appendix, the wait has been worth it. They offer a glimpse into the lives and experiences of a small group of Swedish migrants who encounter the vast open spaces, the dramatic scenery, and the isolation of the great American West. The men are more attracted by the adventure and the opportunity to be found there, but the women find their new environment more lonely and challenging. Their



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attracted a significant number of Swedes.

This volume offers many interesting insights into another facet of the immigration experience for Swedish-Americans in the U.S., one not previously examined by many other writers. Or, if you have roots in any of these mountain state communities, you may find connections to your own relatives or others that you know. For readers in Sweden, a brief biography with dates and places of birth is given for each letter writer, and you may find a connection to a distant or long-lost relative in America, or their descendants.

Dennis L. Johnson

reactions and thoughts are revealed in these letters written mostly to relatives or friends in Sweden. Laborious longhand writing, long waits for delivery and a response, and cost, all played a part in making letters few and far between. This no doubt amplified the feelings of isolation and loneliness and added to the challenges faced by these pioneers and adventurers.

Cities in the west which are described or mentioned in these letters include Alhambra, Butte, Bozeman, Froid, Marysville, and Anaconda in Montana; Aspen, Boulder, Central City, Colorado Springs, Denver, Englewood, Leadville, Loveland, Telluride, Victor, Pueblo, and Longmont in Colorado; Bay Horse, Blackfoot, Boise, Burke, Coeur d'Alene, Custer, Firth, Gem, Idaho Falls, Kellogg, New Sweden, Rocky Bar, and Troy in Idaho; Hanna, Laramie, Rawlins, Rock Springs, and Wamsutter in Wyoming; Bingham, Cedar City, Grantsville, Gunnison, Hyrum, Park City, and Salt Lake City in Utah; and a number of other places in those and other mountain states. These many cities serve to illustrate how widely scattered these Swedes were in the last decades of the 19th century.

Other than Salt Lake City and Denver, few of these towns had a large enough Swedish population to found the usual Lutheran and Free churches for their communities. Most more isolated Swedes found themselves either unaffiliated with a church, or joined another denomination in the locality. Often Baptist churches were chosen, and in Utah and Idaho, the Mormon Church

The book is in English, and all writers have clear mastery of this language.

Readers of the SAG journal may find the essays about Sweden the more compelling, but the enormous variety of cultural landscapes found in all the other locations comprising Norden is most impressive. The editors, and several of the essayists, go to great lengths to define "Landscape" as used in this book, not all of them in total agreement. The essence of their usage to this writer is that the physical features in a particular area are modified by human habitation over many centuries. For example, the Norwegian fjords have been occupied for thousands of years by people who have lived off the land and off the sea for all that time, in varying patterns of land use and dwellings. One pair of essayists, Ingvild Austad and Leif Haug, attempt in their essay to trace these changes in landscape along the Norwegian fjords, and to describe their impact over the centuries.

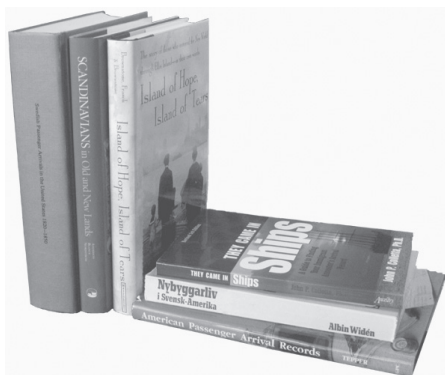
Many other authors of essays in this volume deal with the varied aspects of landscape such as the esthetic landscape as perceived by outsiders, the effect of patterns of land ownership and inheritance on the appearance of the land, use of land for multiple purposes such as animal husbandry, crop raising, forestry, mining, etc., the effects of "enclosure" in the 19th century, emigration, and the impact of each on the land. Other factors also come into play. Most of the essays deal primarily with the traditional historic uses of land, but very little with the massive urbanization of the 20th century. This has resulted in depopulation of many areas formerly more heavily occupied, with most population growth since the mid-19th century confined mainly to the larger cities.

The authors and editors included in *Nordic Landscapes* represent vari-

The North of Europe

Nordic Landscapes, Region and Belonging on the Northern Edge of Europe, Michael Jones and Kenneth R. Olweg, Editors, University of Minnesota Press, 2008, Softcover, 628 pages, Ill., U. of M. Press, \$35.00

A comprehensive and heavy text, *Nordic Landscapes* is a collection of twenty essays about the many and varied landscape regions found in the nations making up *Norden*. The editors have contributed an introduction and two concluding essays to help define the scope of the book and the general conclusions to be drawn from the essays. The term "Norden" as used by the authors, includes the states of Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, plus the smaller territories of the Åland archipelago, the Faeroe Islands (*Färöarna*), and Greenland. There are five essays each dealing with the varied landscapes of Sweden, Norway, and Finland (including one on Åland), two on Denmark, and one each on Iceland, Greenland, and the Faeroes.



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ous disciplines related to landscape study. Half the writers are geographers, with representation also from landscape architects and planners, human geographers, anthropologists, ethnologists, a landscape ecologist, and an archeologist. Nearly all are professors in their disciplines at various universities in Nordic countries. A few write very simply and concisely; many of the essays soar in academic prose intended more for their peers than for the interested lay reader. All are well-documented and footnoted. The approaches are varied, but a common thread running through most of the essays is a nostalgia for the older patterns of culture and land use created by the cultures using the land. There is concern for the protection and conservation of these traditional landscape patterns as opposed to urbanization or change.

The five essays about Swedish landscapes include one on the regional identity of historical Sweden by Ulf Sporrang, images of Skåne by Tomas Germundsson, the province of Dalecarlia (*Dalarna*) by Ulf Sporrang, Selma Lagerlöf's Värmland, by Gabriel Bladh, and one on the *hagmark* landscape by Margareta Ihse and Helle Skånes. (The *hagmark* landscape is one of a complex mixture of forests, fields, and grasslands so typical of many parts of Sweden.) The authors all point out and illustrate with recent and historical photographs the amount of change that has taken place in all these landscapes brought about the decline of small landholdings and subsistence farming. Many fields have reverted to forest, and farming has greatly

increased in scale on the more fertile lands. I saw this myself in Småland where small fields were bordered by straight stone walls once dividing the many small holdings of many farmers. The fields have reverted to forest but the stone walls, so laboriously hand built hundreds of years ago, still remain among the trees.

Another feature common to Sweden, Norway, and elsewhere is the abundance of summer houses on land once used for farming but now too small or irregular for mechanized farming. The many original houses remain, however, maintained and remodeled by their new and probably urban owners as summer retreats. Distinctions in shaping the landscape brought about by the roles of crop raising, animal husbandry, and fishing, or various combinations of these three in different locations, are made clear. Another common feature in many areas was the distinction between farmer-owned cropland near his home, outfields for cattle and raising hay, and the high summer fields for summer cattle grazing, all needed in many areas to sustain the farmers.

Readers having ancestors from the many different regions or provinces discussed in this text will find this book rewarding in helping them understand the lives and surroundings of those who lived there, and how they survived. Geographers, landscape architects, and students of the folk cultures of these areas will also find this book rewarding in their understandings of the relations between the lives of people in earlier days, and how these age-old patterns of living had an important impact on the land and on the landscape of many different areas, from the lakes and forests of Finland to the fjords of Norway, the varied landscapes of Sweden, the unique challenges of living in the Faeroes, and the more recent (in the last one thousand years) settlement of Iceland and Greenland.

Americans, with a much shorter history of settlement (less than 400 years) on formerly sparsely inhabited lands, will gain a broader perspective on the effects of pioneer settlement on the varied landscapes of the United States.

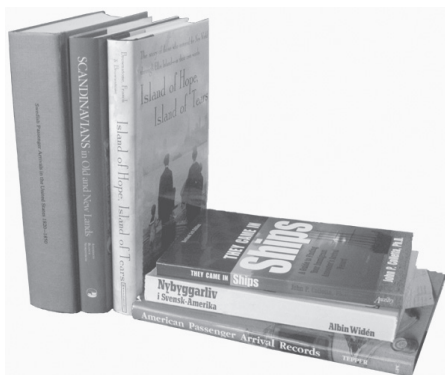
Dennis L. Johnson

Michigan – the Mitten State

Scandinavians in Michigan, by Jeffrey W. Hancks, Michigan State University Press, 2006, softcover, 86 pages, Ill., Amazon.com, \$11.95 plus shipping.

This slim volume was written as one of a series of books called "Discovering the Peoples of Michigan," about the many people that make up this diverse state. There are over twenty volumes in this series and this book groups all the Scandinavian countries into one volume. Michigan is not as well known as many other states for having large numbers of Swedes, Norwegians, or Danes, however, and by 1900, persons born in these three nations made up only about 1.7 % of the 1900 population of 2,420,000.

Michigan had a population in 2005 of about 10,120,000 and is now the eighth largest state in the U.S. in population. It was explored in the early 17th century and a few people drifted into the area in the 18th century, but the area was not opened to settlement until after 1823, with the completion of the Erie Canal. This provided easy access by water from the East Coast to the Great Lakes, and the state then grew rapidly. It became the 26th state in 1837. Michigan is unique geographically, having the largest fresh water shoreline in the world, being bounded by four of the five great lakes. It is divided into the Upper Peninsula



(U.P.) and the Lower Peninsula, now connected by a five-mile long bridge at the Straits of Mackinac. This has led to Upper Peninsula residents being referred to as “yoopers” (U. P. ers), and Lower Peninsula residents are sometimes called “trolls” (because they live below the bridge).

The author, Jeffrey Hancks, is an expert in Scandinavian studies, having earned his B.A. from North Park University in Chicago and an M.A. in Scandinavian Studies and Library and Information Studies from the University of Wisconsin. He is now the Endowed Professor of Icarian and Regional Studies at Western Illinois University. Prof. Hancks identifies himself as a Danish-American; in this book he is quite evenhanded in the attention given to each of the Scandinavian nationalities. He does display a little more subliminal enthusiasm for the history of Danes in Michigan, but this is minor and easily forgiven. With a fairly small representation of each nationality in Michigan, there was not a great deal of information to work with, resulting in a fairly brief but factually informative book.

The reason for the small representation of Scandinavians in Michigan appears to be largely a matter of timing. Land in Michigan was mostly already settled by the years of the mass migrations from Scandinavia, or about 1870 to 1900. Those that did settle in Michigan did so largely due to forestry and mining in the northern part of the state and in the Upper Peninsula before 1900. Those arriving in Michigan after 1900 were in large part destined for the rapidly growing cities and industries, prin-

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cipally Detroit, Lansing, Flint, Grand Rapids, and a few other cities in the South and Southeast part of the state. The greater number of Scandinavians seeking farmland during the last decades of the 19th century passed Michigan by and settled in Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, and neighboring states to the west. By 1860, access to the west had shifted from the Erie Canal and the Great Lakes to the rapidly expanding railroad system from the east.

The chapters in this book address each Scandinavian group in Michigan in turn; Denmark, then Sweden, and then Norway. The chapters are

thorough and readable, with some anecdotes about the earliest settlers, intermixed with early photos and maps that show settlement patterns in the state. Interesting sidebars within these chapters highlight related subjects such as the Danish Sisterhood of America, The Danish Festival in Greenville, one on Dr. Glenn T. Seaborg, Nobel prize winning Swedish American from Ishpeming in the Upper Peninsula, one on Norwegian skiing in Michigan, and one on Icelanders in Michigan. One interesting table charts Native-born Scandinavians in Michigan by nation from 1850 through 1900.

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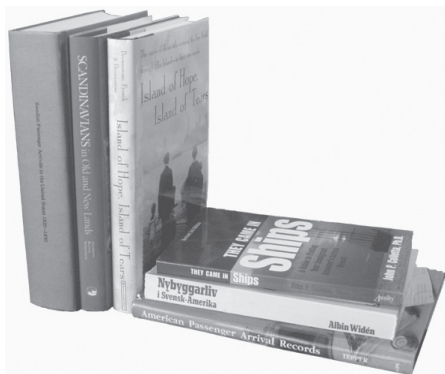
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Norwegians took the lead in numbers until 1860, but were soon bypassed by Swedes after that date. Danes remained the fewest, reflecting the smaller per cent of Danes who immigrated as compared with Swedes and Norwegians. All of the numbers were quite small, however, totaling only 41,000 by 1900.

To make up for the small numbers, the author has included several appendices listing such facts as the names of the official Scandinavian representatives in Michigan, a listing of Scandinavian-American civic and cultural organizations in Michigan (quite short), a list of Scandinavian place names in Michigan, past and present Scandinavian newspapers in Michigan (very short), a few Scandi-

navian-American recipes, and even an example of Scandinavian-American folk humor. Information included is well footnoted, and a long reading list for those seeking more information is also included. Most of the suggested references are generally about Scandinavian Americans in the U.S. and not specifically in Michigan. Except for the presence on the reference list of a few local histories of places in Michigan, it would appear that there is room for a good deal more investigation into the early history of Swedes and Scandinavians in Michigan.

Dennis L. Johnson

The Orphanage CD

Recently the *StorStockholms Genealogiska Förening* of Greater Stockholm released their new CD, called

Barnhusskivan (The Orphanage CD), which has information on about 54,000 orphans who have passed through the *Allmänna Barnhuset* (Public Orphanage) of Stockholm during the early stages of their lives.

The information starts in 1713 and ends in 1900, and the contents vary a lot during this long period. The information is also more or less informative depending on the age of the child when it was placed in the orphanage. If it was not just a baby, there *might* be information about the parents. Most children were placed in foster care throughout the country, and in this CD there is a possibility to find data in the Orphanage archives at the Stockholm City Archives (*Stadsarkivet*). This institution has also put some orphan documents online from 1798 to 1908, see link on p. 30.

The price of the Orphanage CD is 395 SEK, but contact Carl Szabad at <szabad@algonet.se> for more information.

New and Noteworthy

(short notes on interesting books and articles)

Bluestem is a new romantic novel by *Thomas N. Holmquist*. Young Gust lets his eye rest on the 17-year old Lovisa during *Julotta* service in the Swedish Lutheran church in Kansas in 1869, and we can all guess what comes next: the stern father forbidding the young man to come and visit, and so on. A charming story for a rainy day. The author is a historian, educator, writer, rancher/farmer, and a lifelong resident of the Smoky Valley of Kansas, and has obviously Swedish roots.

The *Swedish-American Historical Quarterly* of April 2008 has as its main feature a story by Roger McKnight about the *Dinkytown Murder: A study of Violence, Media Response and Immigrant Assimilation in Nineteenth-Century Minnesota*. This story tells about three Swedish immigrants that did not find those streets paved in gold. They were Gust Erickson, Frank Johnson, and Swan Lindquist and in January 1876 Gust was murdered by Frank, who believed that Gust had planned to murder him, and had decided to act first. Gust Erickson was born Anders Gustaf Eriksson in 1854 in the small parish of Bitterna, (Skar.), and had immigrated in 1872. Swan Lindquist was also born in Bitterna, but in 1853, and his Swedish name was Svante Jonasson, and he had sailed for America in the company of Gust Erickson. Frank Johnson was born in 1847 in Grönhult, (Skar.), and left for America in 1873. What happened next is an intriguing story that ends in Stillwater Prison.

Family Tree Magazine, September 2008, has a lot of interesting reading. Notable is the yearly list of 101 Best Web Sites for genealogy, where you can find many helpful web sites to visit. One example is the FamilySearchLabs at <labs.familysearch.org>, where you can get a glimpse of the development of this popular site. Another site that is due for a visit is the Massachusetts Archives, with an index to the state's vital records 1841-1910...